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SUBJECT: ESTONIA: POLITICAL CONSOLIDATION ON THE RIGHT

¶1. (U) Two right-wing Estonian political parties, Res Publica (RP) and Pro Patria Union (PPU), have decided to merge and form a new political party, Party For Estonia (PFE). Tonis Lukas, PPU Chairman, and Taavi Veskimägi, RP Chairman, signed a memorandum of understanding and published a declaration explaining the merger's objectives-- both to the members of both parties and to the wider Estonian public -- on April 4. The merger is set to take place contingent upon the decisions by both RP and PPU's congresses in June. Both RP and PPU will maintain separate leadership structures until the end of a transition period, set for June 2007, at which time the PFE will hold its first congress. The new party expects to gather more than 8,500 members and will have 33 seats in the current parliament.

¶2. (U) The common declaration underscores RP and PPU's common European values (both belong to the European People's Party): "The values that bind us are a forward-looking orientation of the society, survival of the nation and culture, broadening of people's freedoms and opportunities, honest governance, caring and thrift." The principle aim of the merger is to maintain the country's success by uniting to "create a strong and stable rightist conservative force" and a "green" way of life.

¶3. (U) Other political parties expressed varying opinions in connection with the birth of the PFE. MP Rain Rosimannus from the Reform Party's Board said that joining forces could make up for the weaknesses of the two parties: Pro Patria's lack of strong leaders and weak organization were RP's strengths. Rosimannus also told the media that consolidation on the right could be an "important as counterbalance to the Center Party's long, highly successful activity to unify and integrate leftist forces."

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Political observers have so far been positive about the merger, saying it can only benefit voters by trimming the number of parties. The press has also speculated that the PFE may usher in a serious challenge to the Reform Party, which considers itself the flagbearer of the right. However, it is still quite possible that both RP and PPU may lose members opposed to the merger who defect to the Reform Party. RP's lack of ideological cohesion -- it came into existence as a protest party -- will not help. There has already been some vocal criticism from RP's Russian-speaking members, who are ill at ease with PPU's perceived nationalism. And there is also some doubt whether the merger will actually go through in the end. As the consolidation of party organization is not set until after the next parliamentary elections, either party could step back from the deal.

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